

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 007899

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/18/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [SOCI](#) [PINR](#) [XF](#)

SUBJECT: MFA CABINET MIDDLE EAST ADVISOR ON DOMESTIC  
INTEGRATION, DISCRIMINATION, AND ISLAM IN FRANCE

REF: PARIS 7835 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: MFA Cabinet advisor on Maghreb/Arabian Gulf issues Francois Thoizy, during a November 17 discussion on GoF policy in the Gulf and Maghreb (septel), offered unusually frank observations on domestic integration and discrimination issues, referring frequently to his status as the first Middle East advisor to a French Foreign Minister to be of Arab (in his case Algerian and non-practicing Muslim) background. Thoizy assessed recent unrest in the suburbs (reftel) as the combined result of successful activist policing and deep alienation among immigrant-origin youth, who feel like France's "unwanted" children. Thoizy also suggested that France should seek to become a center for formulating a reformed Islam, in line with secular Western values. Thoizy conceded that his own success may have been due in part to his European appearance and name and readily described everyday discrimination faced by family members. Nevertheless, he remained upbeat that France's recent suburban troubles could jolt France towards becoming a more inclusive society, in which immigrants are viewed as an opportunity, not a problem. End summary.

2. (C) Throughout a November 17 discussion with poloff on regional issues (septel), MFA Cabinet advisor on Maghreb/Arabian Gulf issues Francois Thoizy referred frequently to his ethnic background, and the fact that he was the first foreign ministry cabinet advisor on Middle East issues of Arab background. (Bio note: Thoizy was born in France and both his parents emigrated to France from Algeria. He describes himself as a non-practicing Muslim, and speaks fluent Arabic. He is a career diplomat, but also made frequent reference to his close ties, and past work for, FM Douste-Blazy in the UMP party. End note.) Thoizy claimed he was noticed right away by President Chirac shortly after he came on board in the minister's cabinet last summer, when he traveled with the presidential delegation attending King Fahd's funeral in Saudi Arabia. He said Chirac was delighted to meet him and commented how proud he was to see a young man "of immigrant origin" reaching his position. Thoizy added that his background and Arabic fluency deepened his relations with Arab government contacts, who saw him as "one of them" and not an ordinary French diplomat.

3. (C) In addition to working Middle East issues, Thoizy said he also advises Douste-Blazy on equality/Islam in France issues, which he described as a particular area of interest for the FM. Thoizy took credit for Douste-Blazy's decision to meet with the Grand Mufti during a September 2005 visit to Egypt, and said he was trying to promote the idea that France should seek to become a center of Islamic thought, and "ijtihad," by which the Qur'an would be reinterpreted to meet current realities and adapt to secular, Western societies. He said in his personal view, France should aspire to be seen as a "Islam-Judeo-Christian" society, an idea which reflected the realities of French diversity, though, on the surface, it seemed anathema to France's secular tradition.

4. (C) Thoizy viewed the recent unrest in French suburbs as the result of two factors: 1) Interior Minister Sarkozy's tough law and order policies, which had successfully squeezed criminal gang elements, to the point that they exploited the situation and incited youth to riot to "get back" at police; 2) a long simmering expression of outrage from immigrant youth who feel like they are the "unwanted" (he used the word "aborted") children of the French Republic. Thoizy was optimistic, however that the unrest could ultimately bring good results, in that it could push France to take a different approach and accept all its citizens, and perhaps enlarge the ideal of what it means to be French to reflect France's multicultural diversity. He noted, for instance, that more French speakers worldwide are Muslim than Christian, if one includes all of France's former colonies. Thoizy said that while he was not favorable towards quotas, he absolutely supported "positive action" to redress discrimination in France. Thoizy expressed interest in exchanging views further, particularly on the U.S. experience in combating discrimination and implementing "affirmative action" programs beyond mere quotas.

5. (C) Asked whether he had personally experienced discrimination, he demurred, noting that his European

appearance and French first name (named after his father's "best friend") made things easier. His brother, on the other hand, who looked Arab and had an Arabic name and darker skin, had numerous encounters with racism, and sometimes felt scrutinized for "being a terrorist." One of his nieces, meanwhile, was about to change her Arabic-sounding first name, because she couldn't get any call backs on jobs, even though she had a U.S. diploma, spoke fluent English and had good grades. His mother-in-law, who is veiled, told him recently she didn't want to go out any more in central Paris, because she faced disapproving looks and insulting remarks for being veiled. Despite the examples of everyday discrimination which he cited, Thoizy expressed hope that the recent crisis would prompt a shift in GoF policies and public attitudes, to the point at which France views its immigrants as an opportunity, not a problem.

COMMENT

-----

16. (C) Thoizy's candor in discussing race/religion issues in France is unusual for a GoF official, but as he stressed throughout the discussion, he is not a typical MFA diplomat. Based on Thoizy's interest in learning more about the U.S. approach to combating discrimination and his stated interest in pursuing cooperation on Maghreb issues (septel), we view him as an excellent candidate for an IVLP or Voluntary Visitor program to the U.S. End comment.

Please visit Paris' Classified Website at:  
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/paris/index.cfm>

Stapleton